

Montana SCHOOLS

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Newsletter of the Montana
Office of Public Instruction
Nancy Keenan, Superintendent
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Coming Together: Working for Our Future

ust as a school's climate plays a crucial role in the kinds and quality of instruction and the ultimate success of its students' learning experience, an office's environment directly affects the kinds and quality of work that gets done.

Since State Superintendent Nancy Keenan took office in 1989, the official motto of the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has been, "If it's good for kids, the answer is yes!" Combined with an emphasis on cooperation, reflective leadership, and hard work, this approach has helped OPI and Montana's K-12 education community work together to provide the best education possible for Montana's students.

In the past 12 years our world has changed dramatically, along with the work world Montana's students need to prepare for. In response, the field of education has evolved as has the work conducted by OPI staff. This work is ongoing; as always, the new will replace the old as our understanding matures.

This issue of *Montana Schools* provides a historical look at OPI initiative and a view of things to come. It contains articles written by OPI staff about key programs and educational developments that started

**"If it's good for kids,
the answer is yes!"**

during the Keenan administration and will continue to direct and affect education in Montana for years to come. This issue is

intended as an overview of just a few of the many of many important and exciting projects that are happening at OPI that are good for Montana's kids. ■



Twelve years ago, State Superintendent Nancy Keenan reads to Helena Hawthorne Elementary students during the school's "Rock and Read Week" in 1989. Since then, Keenan and OPI staff have helped Montana schools offer our children the best possible for their future.

Evolving partnerships distinguish OPI's work

Over the last decade, leaders from every segment of Montana's education community have realized that we serve our diverse constituents best when we work together. That realization resulted in a team approach to everyday problem solving and future planning for a brighter tomorrow for Montana's children. Of course we have differences of opinions, viewpoints, and responsibilities due to our constitutional mandates, organizational charters, or contracts. Nonetheless, the team concept allows us to recognize and respect our differences, and whenever possible, to put those differences behind us as we advocate for Montana's much valued and acclaimed educational system.

Montana's education team

Who makes up this team you might ask? Although each and every organization is not involved every time we get together, the majority of leadership comes from the Board of Public Education, Office of Public Instruction (OPI), Montana School Boards Association, Montana Education Association-Montana Federation of Teachers, School Administrators of Montana, the Office of the Commis-

sioner of Higher Education, the Montana Parent Teacher Association, the Montana Rural Education Association, and the myriad of subsidiary organizations that are affiliated with these entities.

The Education Forum, which includes all these entities, meets monthly (weekly during legislative sessions) to tackle tough educational issues and to plan strategies. The discussions are lively, at times heated, and sometimes consensus and compromise prove illusive. When that happens, we move on with mutual respect and appreciation for our diversity.

Our means of reaching out to one another are as numerous as the participants on the team. Each month during the school year, for example, school and county superintendents in the nine regions around Montana, get together to share information and to problem solve. In the seven years since OPI representatives began attending these meetings, communication between OPI staff and educators in the field has improved markedly. The meetings are an informal means for OPI to distribute information about the agency's activities, to receive feedback, and to respond to questions from school leaders.

OPI, through the state constitu-

tion, state and federal law, and administrative rule, serves both a regulatory and a service function. On the regulatory side, the office carries out its mandates according to the law. On the service side, whether it be in the area of accreditation, certification, standards, assessment, professional development, or federal and state program implementation, OPI facilitates processes that bring entities to the decision-making table.

It is the mission of OPI to advocate, communicate, educate, and be accountable to those we serve. Among our communication tools are *Montana Schools*, a quarterly publication, the monthly *Summary of OPI Activities*, and the OPI web site <www.metnet.state.mt.us>. Another important communication tool is the Montana Statewide Education Profile. The Profile provides information about our K-12 public schools and students across a range of indicators of quality, such as program offerings, environment for learning, student achievement, and student success. The next issue of *The Profile* will come out in the spring. ■

— Bill Cooper, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction and Madalyn Quinlan, OPI Chief of Staff

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A Message from Nancy Keenan

This year's economic report card gave high marks to Montana in only two areas – education and quality of life. Credit for our success in education goes largely to you, our Montana teachers. In spite of funding threats, aging school infrastructure, increasing educational challenges – technology, students at risk, litigation, standards development, and inadequate teacher salaries – you continue to perform professionally and enthusiastically on behalf of our students and communities. You get the credit, the extra credit, for Montana "making the grade."



Leadership has been the key to success in education in Montana. This is not the leadership we sometimes think of – it is not just managing, however

effectively, what we are now. Leadership is finding ways to help those around us move ahead to what they can be, to see new and brighter opportunities for all of our students. We are all called upon to be leaders: teachers and administrators, parents and community members, school trustees and students. Leadership requires us to be self-reflective and courageous, understanding who we are and taking risks to effect change, to serve all the kids in Montana.

Our "attitude of leadership" can give us a new lens through which we examine our school climate, to do a gut check on our own progress by asking ourselves:

- ✓ Are we serving all kids?
- ✓ How are we teaching kids to be successful citizens?
- ✓ Are we creating peaceful, respectful, challenging learning environments?

I believe in wise investment. And, I believe the best investment we can make in our future is to invest in education. Education investment starts with teachers. Those of you on the front line of education need time to reflect on current practices, time to study and learn new approaches, and you need the resources to put your new learning to work in the classroom. Professional development is the foundation for school improve-

ment and educational change. It is the investment that will bring the school improvement initiative to fruition.

School funding for adequate teacher salaries is an investment in you, our precious resource of skilled professional educators. It is also an investment in the next generation of Montana teachers who shouldn't have to move to Utah or Ohio to get a starting salary high enough to help repay their student loans.

It has been an honor to serve as your Superintendent for the last 12 years. Your next Superintendent, Linda McCulloch, will carry forward the good work we have begun and

is lucky to work for the best teachers in the nation. I know you will help her lead the education community forward, just as you have helped me. Thank you for all you do for the students and communities of Montana.

You will forever have my respect, admiration, and affection.

Nancy Keenan

A Message from Linda McCulloch

The education our children receive in Montana's schools will not only shape their future, but our state's future as well. As Lester Thurow, a prominent, Montana-educated economist, says, "The most important infrastructure investment in building a better economy is education."

Economic development starts in the classroom. Without an excellent public school system to help prepare our students for the challenges they will face at work, at home, and at play, Montana will be unable to meet the challenges of the new economy.



As an educator and a three-term legislator, I know that decisions made at the state level – whether in the Legislature or at the Office of Public Instruction – have an effect on what happens in local schools and classrooms. If Montana is to move up from the bottom rung in job growth and median

wages (not to mention teacher salaries), we need to advocate for public education in our state. We need strong leaders with strong voices; we need to preserve and expand our cooperative efforts; and we *all* need to get involved to support and promote education.

Now that I'm here in Helena, I need your help and advice.

First, we all – administrators, teachers, parents, and concerned community members – must take the lead in educating our new legislators about issues important to education and about adequate funding for education. The 2001 legislative

process has already begun; please, contact your state representative and senator early and often. Don't let them forget the fundamental role that education plays in economic development and attracting business, as well as in the lives of Montana's children.

Also, I would like to hear from you about the state of education in Montana and the priorities that this office should establish in the coming year. What would you like to see the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) address, emphasize, and continue? What would you like OPI to do differently? Please let me know where you think we should go from here.

During the past 12 years under Nancy Keenan's leadership, Montana's public education system has made some great gains. One of her most important contributions is the work she has done to establish partnerships both within the various sectors of the education community and around issues crucial to educating our children. I will be working to maintain, continue, and expand the cooperative efforts of those groups while expanding them to include parents, community members, and business groups.

Once again, please get involved. As you know, many exciting things are underway in schools and classrooms around the state. But education is a dynamic field, and our state's public school system needs constant care and strong support to flourish. If we let it languish, then all of us will lose.

Thank you for the support, advice, and encouragement you've given me in the past. I look forward to hearing from you and working with you in the coming years.

Linda McCulloch

The Montana Behavioral Initiative: What a difference it can make

Like so many, and probably most Montana schools six years ago, the Whitefish schools, Castle Rock Middle School (Billings), and Helena Middle School (HMS) shared a dilemma – escalating friction and disrespect among students, as well as between students and staff. Fortunately, these schools shared another attribute as well – a desire for change.

To begin with, parents, students, and staff members identified their concerns: whether it be student safety in the halls and restrooms, student behavior before and after school and in the lunchroom, or negative interactions between staff members. Then, for a change of vision and heart, they turned to the Montana Behavioral Initiative

(MBI), a staff development program created in 1995 by the education community in collaboration with the Montana Board of Crime Control.

Although sociologists may understand our contemporary cultural dynamics, most educators find themselves puzzled by the increasingly complex social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. MBI helps educators develop the attitudes and skills they need to enable students to leave public education with the social competence for success in society and the workplace.

In the field

MBI leaders at Castle Rock say that during their first year of participation, much time was spent laying the groundwork for the eventual climate change, which included estab-

lishing behavioral expectations for students in common areas. Despite some frustrations, end-of-the-year surveys demonstrated that school climate had improved.

This fall, HMS began its fourth year of proactive efforts by targeting RESPECT as its central theme. In addition to participating in respect activities during advisor classes, all students will write essays on respect and a respect display will be created in the main hallway. Both HMS and

Castle Rock exemplify important features of MBI: local team members are free to choose any strategy from an array of proven programs, and outcomes are corroborated by some form of evaluation data.

Another component of MBI is the annual summer institute, where site teams representing school and community members receive training from nationally recognized experts in behavioral studies. The 1999

(MBI, continued on page B)

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Creating Safe Schools: What it Takes

When Annie Johnson (not her real name) was in sixth grade at a Montana middle school, the boy who sat on the bleachers next to her in gym class asked to use the calculator she was borrowing from another classmate. When she said, "No, it isn't mine," he responded, "If you don't, I'll kill you. I'll stab you."

After school, in between sobs, Annie told her mother what had happened.

"Did you tell the teacher?" her mother asked.

"No," Annie said. "If I tell, he'll figure out it was me and hurt me."

That was three years ago. Now in high school Annie says she feels safer, that "the kids aren't so crazy." But there are still times, she admits, when school doesn't feel like a safe place to be. At least not the same as it did when she was in elementary school.

A safe learning environment

Keeping Montana school children safe is important to each of us. Each of us must do our part to ensure that our schools are safe learning environments – free from drugs, tobacco, and alcohol, free from violence and harassment, and free from discrimination and intolerance. In its leadership role, the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has provided resources to build the capacity of schools to adopt concepts and implement programs that can lead to a healthy and safe school environment.

From studies on youth, we know that in the past year too many high school students have brought a weapon to school (about 9 percent), too many students were in physical fights on school property (nearly 13 percent), too many students did not go to school at least once a month because they felt unsafe (3 percent), and too many guns were in too many schools (15 students were expelled from Montana schools during 1998-99 for bringing a gun to school). This same data tells us that most Montana students do not bring weapons to school, do not fight at school, and do not feel unsafe at school.

Schools are working to become safe places for their students. Over the past seven years in Montana, we have observed decreased rates of violence-related behaviors among youth, both at and away from school. In December 1999, a Lee Newspaper poll found that 53 percent of Montanans think schools do a good to excellent job of preventing violence and promoting safety. Another 34 percent said schools do a fair to good job.

OPI initiatives

Obviously, there's still room for improvement,

and OPI is working to help. In our partnership with local schools, OPI has focused efforts on developing character education, improving school safety and violence prevention, addressing student behavior problems, and enhancing health education.

In helping schools work on character education, State Superintendent Nancy Keenan joined with the Montana Parent Teacher and Montana Broadcasters Associations to bring the *Kids on Character* meetings to towns across Montana.

These meetings gave students the chance to explore, discuss, and explain to their peers and their community what concepts like honesty, caring, respect, integrity, and fairness meant to them, and what support they needed from adults to grow into the individuals they wanted to become.

School safety and violence prevention are critical elements of OPI's Safe and Drug-Free Schools program. The OPI has conducted state-

(Safe Schools, continued on page 8)

OPI bill draft requests for the 2001 Legislature

After conferring with various members of Montana's education community to define the greatest needs for Montana's students, the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) submitted these 17 proposals for consideration during the 2001 Legislature.

- ✓ **K-12 BASE Aid Increases (HB31):** Amend 20-9-306 to increase the basic and per-ANB entitlements to the levels in the above sidebar
- ✓ **General Fund Budget Limitations (LC130):** Amend 20-9-308 (2)(b) to strike the limitation related to 104 percent of prior year budget
- ✓ **Increase Pupil Transportation Rates (LC131):** Increase on-schedule pupil transportation rates for bus mileage
- ✓ **National Board Certification Stipends (LC132):** Provide an annual stipend of \$3,000 to full-time Montana public school teachers who are certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- ✓ **School Facility Entitlements (LC133):** Amend 20-9-370 to inflate school facility entitlements for 10-years of no growth
- ✓ **Allow for the Multi-year Accreditation of Schools (LC134):** Amend 20-7-102 to allow for the multi-year accreditation of schools
- ✓ **Vocational and Technical Education Funding Formula (LC135):** Amend 20-7-301 through 306 to adjust:
 - the vocational education funding formula, including the weighting factors used for individual programs, and
 - certain vocational education guidelines and program approval processes
- ✓ **Amend Special Education Funding Allocations (LC136):** Amend the special education funding

Requested funding for K-12 education

	FY 2002	FY 2003
Elementary basic entitlement	\$19,260	\$20,608
Elementary per-ANB entitlement	\$3,909	\$4,182
High School basic entitlement	\$214,000	\$228,980
High School per-ANB entitlement	\$5,210	\$5,575

formula to establish fixed shares for distributing the state special education appropriation to instructional block grants, related-services block grants, reimbursements for disproportionate costs, and special education cooperatives

- ✓ **Guarantee of FAPE for 19, 20, and 21-Year-Olds (LC137):** Expand the guarantee of free and appropriate public education to 19, 20, and 21-year-olds who have been identified as in need of special education services under IDEA
- ✓ **Expand the Non-categorical Option for Special Education Services (LC138):** Amend 20-7-401 (4) to provide that a child who is nine years of age or younger may be identified as a child with a disability without the specific disability being specified
- ✓ **Coordinate School Election Dates (LC139):**
 - Amend 13-10-211 to require write-in candidates to declare their intention at least 30 days before the election
 - Amend 20-3-313 to allow acclamation of election between 30 days before and 15 days before the election
- ✓ **Adjust SB184 Limitations for Schools (LC140):** Exempt schools from 15-10-104
- ✓ **School Finance Cleanup Bill (LC142):** Delete obsolete references, adjust statutory dates, clarify statutes
- ✓ **School Funding Interim Study (LC143):** Create a task force to study the adequacy and equity of funding for K-12 public schools
- ✓ **Revise Schedule for School Transportation Reimbursement (LC382):** Amend formula for calculating reimbursements for pupil transportation
- ✓ **Amend Maximum General Fund Budget to Include 200 Percent of Special Education Payment (LC411):** Amend 20-9-306 (8) to allow a school district to include 200 percent of special education allowable cost payments in its maximum general fund budget
- ✓ **Eliminate Five-Year Phase Down for School with 30 Percent Enrollment Decline (LC412):** Strike the language in 20-9-308 (3) which requires schools with a 30 percent enrollment decline to phase down their budgets on a fixed schedule

Educator awards programs

Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program

Created in honor of the high school teacher who perished in the 1986 Challenger explosion, the Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program provides an annual award of approximately \$28,000 to a Montana teacher. The federally funded program gives outstanding and experienced teachers an opportunity to develop and implement initiatives, to enhance their professional skills, and to improve classroom instruction.

Montana's current Christa McAuliffe Fellow is Dale Waniata who teaches at Helena High School. For his fellowship project, Waniata is creating a Web site to assist teachers in the teaching of Montana history.

Teachers with eight or more years of classroom teaching experience in public or nonpublic schools are eligible to apply for the fellowship. Applications are available in January and February. A statewide selection panel reads and scores the applications, and the state superintendent announces the selection in May of each year. ■

Milken Educator Awards

Since 1993, Superintendent Keenan has presented 35 talented Montana educators with a National Milken Educator Award. These awards each include an unrestricted \$25,000 cash prize and participation in the National Milken Educators Conference in Los Angeles. OPI appoints a blue-ribbon committee that identifies candidates for evaluation and selection. The Milken Foundation makes the final decision, based on the recommendations of the Montana committee. Identification and selection procedures are confidential, and the program does not include a nomination or application procedure.

Announcements are typically made during all-school assemblies and are attended by students, peers, local and state officials, and the media. The Milken Family Foundation was established to discover and advance inventive and effective ways of helping people help themselves and those around them lead productive and satisfying lives. The Foundation advances this mission primarily through its work in education and medical research. ■

— Madalyn Quinlan
OPI Chief of Staff

Montana School Improvement Initiative

• It is no longer good enough to know if students are above or below average; we need to find out whether they are able to attain the standards to which the real world will hold them accountable. •

What's the big deal? Montana has excellent public schools, some of the best in the nation and the world. But even the best schools must strive for continual improvement because in today's world, standing still means being left behind.

So, in 1997 State Superintendent Nancy Keenan formed a partnership with Governor Marc Racicot and jointly proposed to the Montana Legislature a Montana School Improvement Initiative. The initiative was designed to review current practices and support continuous improvement in Montana schools. The key elements of the initiative include:

reviewing and updating content and performance standards; reporting to the public through publication of the Montana Statewide Education Profile; evaluating progress through a coordinated statewide comprehensive assessment system; integrating standards into curriculum and instructional practices; and aligning teacher education, professional development, and accreditation of schools. The initiative was funded by the Legislature in 1997 and in 1999. ■

Appropriate, ongoing, and in-depth professional development will be necessary for the effective implementation of the standards framework. The BPE recently adopted guidelines for quality professional development, and

Professional Development

OPI has met with interested parties from educational groups to develop a statewide system. This statewide system, the Montana Professional Development System (MPDS), is designed to deliver and share instructional strategies and skills to improve teaching and learning. MPDS will expand during the 2001-2003 biennium.

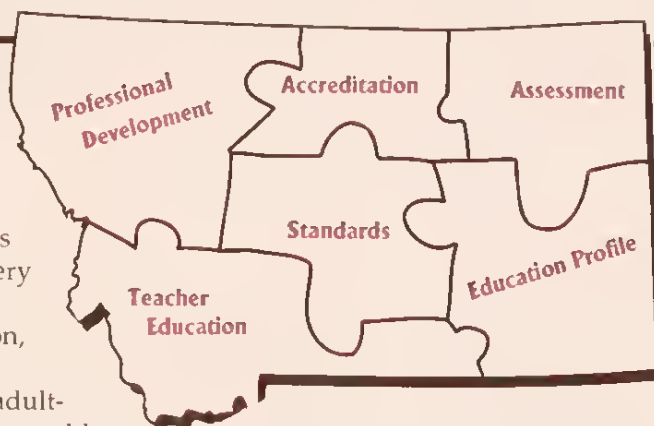
A Professional Development Advisory Board was

established this year to advise OPI on the content and delivery of effective and timely professional development. Advisory board members include, but are not limited to: School Administrators of Montana, Montana Rural Education Association, MSBA, MEA-MFT, Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education, Montana University System, A-Z Curriculum Directors, Governor's Office, Tribal Education Departments, OPI, BPE, CSPAC, and the Montana Council of Deans.

For more information, the PowerPoint presentations from the 2000 Montana Council for Education Leadership and MEA-MFT Educators' Conference are available online. To retrieve them, check the *School Improvement* area on the

It's the dream of every parent to raise a happy, successful child. It's the hope for every student to gain a good education, building a solid foundation for adulthood. In today's world, take more effort to make these hopes and dreams come true. Our children are growing up in an era of rapid change. Success in our high-tech, competitive job market requires more skills and knowledge than in the past.

Montanans needed a plan, a roadmap to success. Montana's educators, parents, and many others created that roadmap through the Montana Standards Framework. This partnership effort established a common set of standards for all Montana students.



After years of research, writing, and revision, the Montana Board of Public Education (BPE) completed the review and adoption of the content and

performance standards for 11 content areas. Montana's framework of challenging academic standards is in place for all basic subjects, such as reading, mathematics, technology, science, and social studies. These content and

The Standards Framework

performance standards provide teachers, parents, students, and the public with a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn.

State Superintendent Nancy Keenan summed up the future challenge: "We are at the crux of our work. We need to make sure our new

standards don't just sit and gather dust, but that they actually improve teaching and learning in Montana's classrooms."

Implementation of the standards framework is the work of Montana's local educators as they align local curricula, instruction, and assessment. Linda Vrooman Peterson, director of the School Improvement Division at the Office of Public Instruction (OPI), explains, "On most journeys, you can reach the same destination by several routes. Montana's standards set the destination and the benchmarks. However, local educators

Special Education: Continuous Improvement Process

Twenty-five years ago, challenges to the basic rights of students with disabilities – their access to public education, their integration into general education, and their due process and civil rights – required an enforcement model to ensure that rights were protected. Today, however, schools and parents of children with disabilities are no longer content to ensure mere procedural compliance. They place high-quality services on a par with procedural rights.

Continuous improvement model

Nationally, all aspects of education show a marked trend toward a continuous improvement model of accountability. This trend is improving the quality of accreditation programs, various federal programs, and district-initiated strategic planning activities. Recently, the federal government adopted this model to monitor states' compliance with requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In Montana, these state and national trends received added impetus when the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education monitored the state in Spring 1999. The OSEP found non-compliance in Montana's monitoring system and encouraged the state to redesign its system to develop an approach that uses a continuous improvement model.

Others in the education community are moving in the same direction. For example, Montana's Board of Public Education indicated that it will use a continuous education improvement process for school accreditation. For students with disabilities to benefit from reform efforts, the process and procedures used for improving the

MBI

continued from page 2

Summer Institute hosted over 800 participants; 776 attended in 2000.

Following the success of the first year at Castle Rock, new staff members with fresh ideas and enthusiasm were attracted to the MBI team, tripling the number involved. After attending the summer institute, the reinvigorated team decided to build upon the school's vision, thus P.R.I.D.E., Positive Relationships and Interactions Do Empower, was born. The P.R.I.D.E. team reintroduced the MBI concept to the staff, parents, and students through video presentations.

Gaining momentum

As a result of the MBI process, many positive and preventative programs are being implemented; since 1995, MBI has spread to 146 schools and communities. The Whitefish schools report changes in attitudes among staff, more tempered interactions among students, and a decline in

quality of special education must, wherever possible, be fully integrated with reform efforts in general education.

The Office of Public Instruction's Division of Special Education plans to implement a continuous improvement process that will integrate the best aspects of the school improvement model, while it retains compo-

expulsions and out-of-school suspensions. In addition, most Whitefish parents feel that their children are in a safe, caring, and loving environment, and children come to school without fear.

At Castle Rock, staff, students, and parents have all commented on the new feeling at school. While problems still exist – as they do at Whitefish and HMS – staff and students interact more positively; student behavior is much less likely to escalate when students feel as though they are being treated fairly and with respect.

With these proving grounds, MBI can only continue to help create what we've come to expect of a Montana school – that it's a good place to be. ■

— Susan Bailey-Anderson, Director of State Improvement Initiatives in OPI's Special Education Division, with help from Randy Chase (Castle Rock), Kim Anderson (Whitefish), and Susan Dotter (HMS)

nents that ensure procedural compliance.

Guiding Principles

The following principles shape the components of the new special education continuous improvement process.

- **Continuous:** The process's procedures must provide for ongoing accountability for compliance with special education requirements and continuous updating and refining of program development.
- **Integrated:** The process's structure must be aligned with the school reform process and improvement models being used in general education programs.
- **Collaborative:** The process must foster long-term relationships and be viewed by parents, schools, and state agencies as a partnership of shared responsibility for improving special education services.
- **Efficient:** The process must allow resources and support to be funneled to those areas needing improvement.
- **Accountable:** The process must use a data-based approach to determine noncompliance and the effectiveness of improvement strategies.
- **Public:** The process must be open to public scrutiny, providing access

When State Superintendent Nancy Keenan took office in 1989, the BPE had recently responded to a new law requiring statewide student testing by approving an administrative rule that all Montana accredited schools test students in grades 3, 8, and 11. With no funding available to implement this **Student Assessment** legislative mandate, the BPE identified the most common tests given by school districts and approved them for reporting results. Over

OPI Web site at <<http://www.metnet.state.mt.us>>.

Future MPDS opportunities include: Instructional Alignment Training for Facilitators conducted by Lisa Carter on February 6-7, 2001, and a 2001 Summer Institute to be held June 11-15.

This fall Nikki Sandve joined OPI as a professional development specialist in the School Improvement Division. She works with OPI staff and Montana educators to advance a coordinated system of professional development. Nikki can be contacted at OPI at 444-7824. ■

— Nancy Coopersmith, Administrator OPI Dept. of Curriculum Services, Linda Peterson, Administrator OPI School Improvement Division, and Nikki Sandve, OPI Professional Development Specialist

the next eight years, gradual changes took place; for example, grade 4 testing replaced grade 3 testing and the list of approved tests grew shorter.

The 1995 Legislature mandated the release of testing results from each school. Since the results were obtained through the use of several different tests and scoring tables, however, the testing data yielded little meaningful information on student performance. This was not remedied until 1999.

The introduction of the School Improvement Initiative in 1997 put major changes to statewide student assessment in motion. The initiative targeted, as its first steps, the revision of standards for subject areas and the establishment of statewide reporting on the quality of Montana schools in the form of the *Montana Statewide Education Profile*, a biennial report which OPI first published in 1999.

The 1999 Legislature continued to fund School Improvement, which then focused on completing the revision of standards and developing a Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS). And, ten years after mandating statewide student assessment, the Legislature appropriated funds for a state-level purchase of a standardized norm-referenced test.

In order to select the test best suited to Montana's needs, the BPE recruited educators with assessment experience and other

interested parties to serve on various task forces and a Request for Proposal Evaluation Team. One task force identified selection criteria for choosing a test instrument; another assessed the degree of match between Montana's standards and existing test instruments. An American Indian Focus Group identified testing issues specific to Indian students. The task forces found that no perfect match existed: some tests assessed some standards quite well and others not as well; and some standards require classroom observation or a performance activity to adequately measure student progress.

After a comprehensive process, the evaluation team recommended that Montana accept Riverside Publishing Company's proposal to provide ITBS and ITED (Iowa Tests) to Montana school districts. In April 2000, Keenan

and the BPE agreed. The tests will be first administered to Montana students in March 2001.

The norm-referenced test results will show how Montana students score relative to those students in the nation who took the same test. School districts will use this as a Phase 1 step in the MontCAS development.

A new component will be the reporting of student results for items that match the Montana Content Standards. The standards that are not adequately measured by the ITBS and ITED will be clearly identified, and Phase 2 of the MontCAS development will determine how to measure those standards. Reading and mathematics will be targeted in 2002 and 2003. ■

— Dori Nielson, Director OPI Division of Education Accountability

Special Education State Improvement Grant

In April 2000, the Division of Special Education at the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) was awarded a five-year, federal State Improvement Grant.

The grant, *Excellence for ALL*, will encompass a number of projects and initiatives that serve four purposes:

- ✓ to align activities within general and special education;
- ✓ to create a unified and coherent agenda of school improvement in Montana;
- ✓ to target specific areas of need unique to the delivery of services to students with disabilities; and
- ✓ to target statewide challenges in areas of personnel preparation, recruitment, retention, and professional development.

The grant work is ambitious. Its key elements include components for students with disabilities' participation in statewide assessment and state performance standards.

Special educators and parents will receive training and support necessary to become active participants in aligning local curricula and instructional methods to new state standards. It is critical that Montana educators understand their responsibility in considering the needs of the entire student population in this process. With this in mind, this initiative will create a unified and coherent agenda of school improvement in Montana. ■

— Susan Bailey-Anderson, OPI Special Ed. State Improvement Initiative Director

School-to-Work implementation picks up speed

High school juniors prepare salad bar items at a local restaurant. Fifth-graders trade pen pal letters with truckers. A coffee shop owner coaches high school students in managing concession stands at ball games. This doesn't sound like what I did in school 30 years ago, and it isn't. These are just a few of School-to-Work (STW) activities going on in 117 Montana high schools.

As STW enters its third year of funding, we are making progress. In 1997, the state received a four-year federal STW grant totaling \$9.6 million that was intended to

provide seed money for building sustainable STW systems in high school districts.

So what exactly is School-to-Work?

That's a good question, and one that troubled many Montana school districts. STW's specified outcomes are broad. In our first full year of implementation, progress was slow, largely due to lack of clarity about these aims. And, since STW was originally conceived as an urban/suburban initiative, there was understandable confusion about developing effective rural strategies. STW

schools asked for a simplified message that made sense in Montana.

So, School-to-Work is:

- *Career Exploration*, so students make more informed career choices, and
- *Workplace Skill Practice*, so students can understand and practice tools they will need in their work lives. These skills can range from individual competencies, such as written communications, to full-scale training courses, such as gasoline engine repair.

What is different about STW is that it is not intended to be a stand-alone program; rather, STW experiences are designed to be delivered in the context of traditional classroom lessons. In addition, STW guidelines require participating high schools to recruit community partners to provide real-world perspective about the workplace. This can take the form of job shadowing, internships, or actual work experience.

One challenge is that many Montana communities have relatively few employers. Another is that certain career fields have little or no presence here – marine biology, technology, heavy manufacturing. Local STW partnerships have proven to be highly resourceful in getting around these obstacles. An effective strategy used by most schools are school-based businesses that teach students about entrepreneurship from the

ground up. Many schools employ distance-learning activities coupled with out-of-town career exploration trips. Every STW partnership has unique success stories.

There is still work to do before the federal funding ends. Most schools need to improve faculty participation (although vocational teachers have almost unanimously supported STW). We need to sell STW to parents so they will push for it to continue. We need to provide teachers with curriculum assistance so they can integrate STW experiences into their lessons.

Overall Montana has reason to be encouraged; once STW aims were clarified, our schools picked up the ball and ran with it. Many desired outcomes can't yet be evaluated, but we believe that most students won't change majors in college every other semester, young people won't quit their first professional job because it wasn't what they expected, and students won't struggle in their early careers due to inadequate workplace skills.

Recently, I spoke with a high school teacher who told me that her students were clearly more interested in their futures, more focused about possible careers. She then laughed and said "And, STW makes it easier to answer the old question: 'Why do I have to learn this?'" ■

— Carl Stevens, OPI STW Specialist



Stevensville high school students gain STW experience in a school-based business.

to planning activities, data, reports, and results.

Simple: The process must be comprehensible for teachers, administrators, parents, and staff.

Future Directions: Next Steps

OPI's Special Education Division will work with at least two IDEA applicants to pilot the new process this spring. The experiences gained through this field test

will allow the process to be evaluated and further refined. The Division of Special Education will continue to collaborate with other OPI and school districts' improvement projects to ensure that current school reform efforts include and address improvement strategies for all Montana students, regardless of their educational need or setting. ■

— Marilyn Pearson, Assistant Administrator OPI Division of Special Education

Montana participates in America Reads!

The first thing one sees upon entering the Helena Indian Alliance after school on a Monday is two people on the steps, one reading to the other. Then three people in the hallway, two children taking turns reading to a tutor. Opening the door to the room that looks most like a classroom, and is indeed the Wakina Sky Learning Circle, one finds four more pairs: one on the couch, three at small tables. Then through a short hallway into the computer lab, another pair. Past the fish tank and peek into a room shaped like a utility closet, another student, another adult.

All reading. And listening.

Back around the tank with no fish, through the hallway, out the door, and open another door, this time unto a room in the throes of renovation. Behind draped bookcases and lamps lacking shades sit the last pair: AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) member, Dave Jersey, and student, Chaz L.

"I keep getting the long ones," Dave teases, referring to the wordy passage on his page.

Chaz laughs and reads his few words. For several pages, they take turns. When Chaz has many lengthy passages in a row, Dave offers to trade.

"No," Chaz says. "I'll do it."

Although Wakina Sky has offered an after school tutoring program for

three years, Dave says reading aloud wasn't emphasized until they began a Montana America Reads program this fall. Only in its third month, Dave says he can see a difference — where there wasn't reading before, there is now. And he can hear a difference too — kids used to stumble, but the words are coming more easily.

In 1998, when a Montana America Reads State Office was opened within the Office of Public Instruction, it outlined one objective: for all Montana children to learn to read well and independently. But to help children learn to read, someone has to be listening. Help came in the form of AmeriCorps*VISTA members who collaborated with the state office to provide reading-tutor training and reading-tutor programs. Over the last two years, seven programs were founded across Montana. For the 2000-2001 school year, another thirteen were added, including Wakina Sky's.

Dave says he uses any contact with the public — flyers at powwows, the service day at Carroll College, open houses at the elementary schools — to recruit potential tutors. It seems to work best when a child has the same tutor at least two days a week.

From 4 to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday, before any other activities, children at Wakina Sky read. And someone listens.

"Ralph and Mo, Mo," Chaz starts, then stops and looks at Dave with uncertainty.

"You know it," Dave says.

Chaz thinks a minute. "Mortimer?" he guesses.



Readers and listeners (including Chaz L and AmeriCorps*VISTA member Dave Jersey, above) gather after school at Helena's Wakina Sky, one of 20 America Reads programs operating in Montana.

Dave nods.

"Are you sure?" Chaz asks.

"Yes," Dave answers.

"Ralph and Mortimer are coming back soon . . .," Chaz reads and reads and reads. ■

— June Atkins, Director OPI America Reads and Lorna Milne, Contributing Editor, Montana Schools

Editor's Note: If you would like more information about Wakina Sky's program, write Wakina Sky Learning Circle, PO Box

Indian Education for All

The Indian Education office serves two purposes. The first is to assure that Indian students and communities receive a quality and equitable education. The second is to assure that all students leave the public education system with an understanding of the rich history and contemporary issues of Montana's Indians. This responsibility is outlined under Article X, Section 1(2) of Montana's Constitution.

"The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity."

—Montana Constitution Article X, Section 1(2)

7 Certification, which is a specialist certification for native language. This class of specialist was created because Montana's university system offers no program that addresses teaching native languages in public schools. It is a unique certification that respects the issue of tribal sovereignty; each person seeking Class 7 certification must go through his or her specific tribe's certification process. Once that process is completed, a designated person within each tribe signs and sends a form to OPI, and the person receives

a teaching certificate.

Upon receiving the certificate, he or she is eligible to teach native language and culture in their public school system. This certification is important to Montana tribes because it offers an avenue for their language to be taught in the school system. There are currently over 100 Class 7 specialists in Montana.

Partnership efforts

The Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education (MACIE) has also been an integral part of OPI Indian Education. The council is an advisory group to the Board of Public Education and OPI. They have proved to be an important group in addressing the issues of Indian student achievement and awareness of Indian issues in the public education system.

Most recently, with the passage of MCA 20-1-501, OPI has worked with the Governor's Office, the Board of Public Education, and the Board of Regents to develop a plan to fully implement the constitutional obligation. As a part of this work, American Indian content has been added to the state content and performance

standards, the teacher education program standards, and the accreditation standards. Professional development modules and curriculum guides are also being refined. These new additions will lead to changes at the local levels in the areas of policy and curriculum. OPI will assist the local efforts by continuing to publish resources and give technical assistance.

In the future, OPI will continue its efforts to work toward an equal and quality education for Indian students in Montana, and to assure that Indian content and issues are a part of Montana's quality public education system for all students. ■

— Denise Juneau, OPI Indian Education Specialist

HB 528 and legislative intent

The 1999 Montana Legislature revisited this constitutional obligation and approved HB 528 (now codified as MCA 20-1-501), which elucidates the legislative intent behind the constitutional language (see sidebar). With the passage of HB 528, the Legislature recognized that neither Montana's history nor current problems can be adequately understood or addressed unless both Indians and non-Indians have an appreciation of the history, culture, and contemporary contributions of Montana's Indian people.

Class 7 Certification

In 1996, OPI developed the Class

MCA 20-1-501: Recognition of American Indian cultural heritage — legislative intent

1. It is the constitutionally declared policy of this state to recognize the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and to be committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural heritage.
- 2(a). Every Montanan, whether Indian or non-Indian, be encouraged to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner; and
- 2(b). Every educational agency and all educational personnel will work cooperatively with Montana tribes or those tribes that are in close proximity, when providing instruction or when implementing an educational goal or adopting a rule related to the education of each Montana citizen, to include information specific to the cultural heritage and contemporary contributions of American Indians, with particular emphasis on Montana Indian tribal groups and governments.
3. It is also the intent of this part, predicated on the belief that all school personnel should have an understanding and awareness of Indian tribes to help them relate effectively with Indian students and parents, that educational personnel provide means by which school personnel will gain an understanding of and appreciation for the American Indian people.

Title I: A vision for disadvantaged children

Title I (termed Chapter 1 between 1981 and 1994) is the largest federal aid program for elementary and secondary schools. During the 2000-2001 school year, this program will funnel just over \$26 million to Montana school districts to support supplementary services designed to improve the educational performance of low-achieving children in high-poverty schools.

Title I also funds four smaller satellite programs: a state-operated program for migratory children, a state-operated program for children in state institutions for neglected and delinquent children, a limited program for children in local institutions for delinquent children, and the Even Start family literacy program.

Distribution of Title I funds and services

Under the core Title I program, school districts receive federal funds through a multi-step allocation process. In turn, they distribute the funds to schools in their jurisdiction with above-average percentages of low-income children. They also provide services for children in local institutions for neglected children, and they must make arrangements to ensure that private school children (in private schools that wish to participate) receive an "equitable" share of services.

The federal grants are allocated according to a legislative formula based mainly on the distribution of low-income children and state per-pupil expenditures. Once the funds reach the participating schools, however, children in those schools are selected on the basis of low academic performance, regardless of income.

Children are typically pulled out of their regular school classes to receive supplementary instruction in reading/language arts and mathematics. Currently, there is a trend toward other service models, such as in class tutoring or after school programs. Also, in a major change of direction that began with Title I's 1988 reauthorization, Congress has expanded the authority of very high-poverty schools to use Title I funds to upgrade the entire school's instructional program as part of a "schoolwide program."

Schoolwide programs

Schoolwide programs are encouraged to use research-based school reform strategies that provide an accelerated and enriched curriculum and increase the amount and quality of learning time. The programs must be integrated with other resources and initiatives, such as the Goals 2000 School Reform program. Schoolwide programs must also provide for preschool transition, parental

involvement, professional development for teachers and other personnel, counseling (if appropriate), career guidance, school-to-work transition, and similar activities.

The intent is still to assist disadvantaged children, but schools achieve this goal by upgrading the entire educational environment. Provisions to track the performance of disadvantaged groups and individual children are in place, so schools can intervene to ensure these children are not left behind.

During the 2000-2001 school year, Title I will funnel just over \$26 million to Montana school districts to support supplementary services designed to improve the educational performance of low-achieving children in high-poverty schools.

In a revolutionary change, schoolwide programs may, under specific guidelines, combine the funds they receive from the U.S. Department of Education, including Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds. As long as Title I schoolwide programs address the intent of the underlying federal programs, they do not need to conform to the specific rules of the other programs other than those relating to civil rights, health and safety, and the like.

Title I linked to state education reform efforts

Many traditional Title I programs targeting only identified students continue to operate. However, these projects must now meet some of the same requirements as schoolwide programs, such as emphasizing accelerated curricula and extended learning times, coordinating their activities with other school reform activities, and providing adequate professional development for teachers and others serving Title I students.

The 1994 amendments to Title I eliminated the mandatory use of norm-referenced achievement tests in Title I. Instead, Title I programs must teach children to the same state curriculum and performance standards as all students in the state. They must also use the same assessment instruments to evaluate the progress of students and schools. This ensures that Title I students are not held to different, lower standards.

As can be seen, Title I reforms were intended to link the Title I accountability system with overall state reform. The current Title I system also establishes higher expectations because it measures progress toward a goal – the goal of all children achieving at a high level. ■

— BJ Granbery, Administrator
OPI Title I Division

METNET

links Montana schools and educators

When the 1989 Montana Legislature passed the School Equalization Act, it allocated funds to establish the Montana Educational Telecommunications Network, or METNET, "to support education, economic development, and government services in the state."

It's worked.

In the past 10 years, METNET has evolved from a dial-up, command-line Bulletin Board System interface to a full-fledged, Web-based communication system with the largest provider of free e-mail for Montana teachers. METNET users can send and receive e-mail, share files, use electronic conferencing, and participate in and provide class instruction. METNET is free to any Montana resident who has access to a computer and a modem or an Internet connection.

Currently, METNET provides:

- ✓ listserv capability to OPI
- ✓ up-to-the minute legislative information on bills, committees, committee hearings, agendas, and journals
- ✓ access to online classes and distance-learning opportunities from MSU-Bozeman and MSU-Billings.
- ✓ a special projects area where educators and students can share information on research projects, travel adventures, etc.
- ✓ school budget and expenditure information
- ✓ school participation in computer software and hardware discounts
- ✓ grant and scholarship information for students and teachers
- ✓ E-Rate information, helping schools obtain over \$6.5 million in federal funds to connect to the Internet
- ✓ information on education conferences, classes, meetings, and related events
- ✓ curriculum conference areas
- ✓ access to Montana education associations
- ✓ school law information
- ✓ extensive list of educational web sites
- ✓ FAQ Server: a knowledge database
- ✓ two-way interactive compressed video facilities
- ✓ electronic filing of the Fall Report: IRIS
- ✓ teacher placement information

(METNET, cont. on page 8)

School Finances How Have We Managed?

The Keenan Administration, fueled by the passage of HB 28 in 1989, has made major improvements in the integrity and usefulness of fiscal data that the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) collects from school districts. Before the Keenan administration, OPI collected districts' annual expenditure, revenue, enrollment, and budget information on paper forms, then spent up to four months manually entering the data into databases. Only then could data be reported to legislative and federal agencies. Districts received little training and no feedback to improve the accuracy, consistency, and comparability of the data between schools.

Planning, training, and technology allow for data consistency, accurate reporting, and improved accountability

Today, school districts submit their information to OPI using an electronic reporting system that provides immediate feedback through online editing. To improve data integrity and to ensure a high level of statewide consistency and comparability, OPI staff provide annual training sessions and technical assistance to schools.

The school district data that OPI collects, processes, and analyzes is important to the long-term financial stability of schools. The data is used by every division of OPI to allocate \$520 million in state funds and \$70 million in federal funds to local education agencies. The Montana Legislature and federal government agencies use data reported by the School Budgeting and Accounting division to determine the types and amounts of state funding and federal education grants awarded to Montana schools.

The School Budgeting and Accounting staff serve as a resource on school finance matters for Montana taxpayers, school district officials, auditors, county officials, OPI management and staff, the Governor's staff, and the Montana Legislature. The division's policy and monitoring responsibilities include: budgeting, accounting, district consolidation, school opening and closures, enrollment and attendance, audits, tuition, school levy elections, student transportation, accounting/reporting for federal funds, district investments, debt, and cash flows.

Improved accountability – through consistent accounting and reporting practices – has been a major aim of the finance staff during the Keenan administration. In 1990, OPI assisted schools in adopting Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), a national set of accounting and reporting standards that help ensure data consistency. In 1991, the division published the Montana School Accounting Manual, which presents uniform accounting policies and procedures for Montana

(School Finance, cont. on page 8)

Career and Technical Education: An Appealing Alternative

In a recent article from the professional journal of the Association for Career and Technical Education, Roger Daniels writes, "A number of sources predict that 65 to 70 percent of tomorrow's workers will need one to three years of technical training beyond high school, but not necessarily a bachelor's degree. In fact, the current shortage of skilled workers recently prompted 19 U.S. Senators to co-sponsor legislation that would relax immigration laws for foreigners who possess technical skills needed in this country."

Daniels goes on to ask and answer the question, "How did we get here? There are two main reasons: the current communications revolution, and the aging of our population. For well over a decade we have been in the midst of a communications revolution. But the fact is, the way we store, transmit, and receive data has been revolutionized over the last decade. Microchips have found their way into virtually every segment of our society. A question I often ask to

make this point among high school students is, which industry in America makes more computers, IBM or GM? The answer is GM."

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are critical for

It is critical that we provide all K-12 students with opportunities for a variety of career and academic pursuits. Strong high school technical education programs enable students to make appropriate choices for post-secondary education.

economic prosperity in Montana. Newspapers, professional journals, and multi-media publications describe over and over again the growing crisis of an ill-prepared work force, and the high-wage opportunities that await technically skilled individuals. Indeed, what already separates the haves and the have-nots, the infamous digital divide, will be the technical

knowledge and opportunities that students gain in strong CTE programs.

The subject areas most commonly associated with career and technical education are business, trade & industrial, health occupations, technology education, agriculture, family and consumer sciences, and marketing. CTE programs focus on career preparation, resource management, communication, technical skill development, applied academics, technological literacy, and personal skills and leadership. Programs are driven by authentic technical applications to prepare students for post-secondary education and the technological workplace.

Because the ultimate goal of CTE is preparing students for the workplace, the Office of Public Instruction's CTE Division has strong

ties with employers in business and industry. Superintendent Nancy Keenan has appointed a Career and Technical Education Advisory Board made up of teachers, administrators, and business and industry representatives to advise the office in matters of funding requests, standards, and program guidelines. The board has developed plans to keep CTE programs strong in Montana and aligned with the needs of both students and the workforce.

It is critical that we provide all K-12 students with opportunities for a variety of career and academic pursuits. Strong high school technical education programs enable students to make appropriate choices for post-secondary education. We are committed to keeping these programs viable. ■

— Jody Messinger, Administrator
OPI Division of CTE

Safe Schools

continued from page 3

wide conferences on youth violence prevention; provided information to schools on effective violence prevention strategies and programs; distributed nearly \$1.5 million annually in federal prevention funds to schools for the prevention of alcohol and drug use and abuse, and the prevention of violent and disruptive behaviors; and developed a Safe Schools Web site on OPI's homepage.

The Safe Schools Web site contains information to help schools assess their facilities and their prevention programs. Two documents designed to improve safety are: Crisis Management in Schools: A Resource Guide; and Safe Schools and Crisis Management: Guidelines, Strategies, and Tools.

METNET

continued from page 7

METNET's other exciting features

Two relatively new and exciting features on METNET are the *Teacher Placement* site and IRIS, our *Internet Reporting and Information Services* site. The *Teacher Placement* site includes a form for schools to submit job openings, a listing of education job openings, and a place for educators to post resumes. The Web site can be found at <<http://JobsForTeachers.opi.state.mt.us>>.

The IRIS system is designed to provide access for the electronic filing of the Fall Report. Through the Fall Report process, OPI collects information from school districts on enrollment, school personnel and teaching assignments, school calendars, non-public school enrollment, dropout data, and student assessment scores. This information is used for accreditation purposes,

student assessment reporting, the Montana Statewide Education Profile, federal reporting, and other reporting purposes. The site was brought up for testing this school year and, after working out a few bugs, it should be a valuable addition to electronic reporting for schools.

Integrating technology into Montana schools and beyond

The METNET staff has been instrumental in integrating technology in Montana's schools. They were early leaders in Montana's *NetDay* activities and have been an ongoing source of information on E-Rate for schools. In addition, METNET and OPI technical staff have worked behind the scenes to implement surplus computer programs that offer surplus equipment

MAEFAIRS

Another tool that has enhanced data integrity over the past six years is MAEFAIRS (the Montana Accounting and Education Finance Information and Reporting System). MAEFAIRS is an electronic reporting/payment system developed to institute a statewide network of electronic data collection from Montana's 56 counties and 450 plus K-12 school districts. The design, maintenance, and daily operation of MAEFAIRS is the responsibility of the accounting staff. A major upgrade of the system is currently being designed by OPI. This budget and expenditure reporting module will be ready next summer. ■

— Kathy Fabiano, Administrator OPI Dept. of Operations and Joan Anderson, Administrator OPI Division of School District Accounting & Budgeting

after all, already make safe and healthy decisions.

Although we're still growing in our understanding of what it takes to keep our schools safe, the OPI has worked cooperatively with Montana's schools and communities to develop and implement

helpful strategies. Perhaps someday soon, our children will tell us that our schools feel safe all the time. ■

— Spencer Sartorius, Administrator
OPI Division of Health Enhancement & Safety and Rick Chiotti, Director
OPI AIDS Education

to our schools. METNET and OPI technical staff have also provided countless hours of support to small school districts with wiring and networking issues.

Along with working with schools, the METNET staff has received praise for their work with the Governor's Office on several Web site projects. In September 2000, Steve Meredith received an award for his involvement in the state *Newslinks* Web site. Steve Meredith, Betsy Nordell, and Janet Andrew also worked with the Governor's Office to produce a *Fire Recovery Informa-*

tion page to aid Montanans affected by wildfires last summer.

Stay in touch

METNET has become a central clearinghouse for education and technology information in Montana. As we continue to grow and expand, we welcome your suggestions for how we can improve our service. Please visit our site at: <<http://www.metnet.state.mt.us>> or call 444-1626 for more information. ■

— Betsy Nordell, OPI Internet/
Web Design Specialist

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